

THE TROJAN WAR ON THE CONTEMPORARY WESTERN STAGE: TRANSVERSAL READINGS

Sylvie Jouanny

Theatre replays the past in the present. What does it tell us of the Trojan War, that symbolic event in Greek culture? This paper offers a reflection on the imaginary and the portrayal of the Trojan War on the contemporary western stage based on the last twenty years' drama criticism in the newspaper *Le Monde*, on published and unpublished pieces over the same period and on essays about the original phenomenon and, more generally, its handing down. The subject has usually been approached with some measure of realism: a mimetic treatment has little interest for audiences, but an oneiric, poetic, mythological approach may spark an enthusiastic response. This more symbolic aesthetic makes the Trojan War an archetypal conflict which inspires a theatrical search for answers but also a message of hope: what should we conclude/how can we reconcile them both?



In the words of Malraux in *Les Conquérants*, “the Renaissance created Antiquity as much as Antiquity created the Renaissance” (1928). If our times, essentially preoccupied with modern issues, preclude such comparisons, we can at least enquire into contemporary perceptions of Antiquity and their incorporation in our heritage. The Trojan War, iconic period of Greek culture, constitutes fertile ground for study: its ten years of war, its controversial historical authenticity, its retelling through the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, its events, and its participants, both real and epic, which begin in the realms of vaudeville, with Helen's abduction, and finish in those of fairy tales, the Greek victory at the end of a turbulent campaign and an unforgettable stratagem ... Is it surprising that it has become an unending source of inspiration for all time?

Giraudoux and his *Guerre de Troie N'Aura Pas Lieu* (1935) may be familiar, but what about contemporary theatrical representations of the Trojan War?

Γράμμα / Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism 22 (2014)

© 2014 by Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

From that of our imagination's stage, with all its connotations, to those of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which have never known such a sustained period of peace but where there is conflict on all fronts and in every latitude. With the aim of distinguishing current versions of the Trojan War as clearly as possible, our study will begin, with the theatre and, initially, with the state of enunciations in person which constitute all theatrical productions; it will, then, look at how the stage production—including both stage and auditorium in the dual dimensions of creating and receiving—elucidates texts of the same period; it will, finally, confront this inventory with current thinking on the transmission of Antique heritage and of the Trojan War, in particular, showing how reality may become increasingly overshadowed by its conceptualization. This study will progress by comparative readings, which will multiply viewpoints and shed light from different angles, partly by looking at the theatre reviews from *Le Monde*¹ over the last twenty years (1993-2013), but also at literary texts intended for the theatre, both unpublished and published, and, partly by comparing reflective, theatrical, and literary texts which deal with the very possibility of depicting the Trojan War. Our journey will take us from the theatrical experience to reflecting on the imaginary and the depiction of the Trojan War and it will show how the criteria of realism bear on dramatic criticism as much as the poetry of the writing or intellectual concepts.

Twenty Years of the Trojan War on the Western Stage Viewed by *Le Monde*: From Realism to Stage Direction

Firstly, the small number of productions over twenty years should be noted: only eight, or one every two and a half years. Half of these came from the “classic” repertory, but, nonetheless, not all stem from the most common Homeric or tragic sources: Seneca's *Agamemnon*, Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, and Goethe's *Iphigenia in Tauris*. The rest took their inspiration from the Trojan War—from those transposing the myth, in realistic fashion, to the most symbolic.

The most memorable realism undoubtedly came from the Israeli production by Ilan Ronen *War as in War*, performed by the national Habima theatre in Tel Aviv in February 2002 and written in the twenties (Dupeyron 2002). Famous in Israeli theatre, and born at the same time as the state of Israel, Ilan Ronen felt it his duty to portray the “inexorable nature of horror, ... the impossibility of the future for the children of the persecutors as much as for those of the victims” (qtd. in Dupeyron 2002). According to Catherine Dupeyron, the staging was as important as the text: the actor's gestures, artificially controlled by other actors, illustrated the fact that political leaders manipulate people like puppets.

1. According to the panoramic perspective we are adopting here, we will consider the period as a whole rather than year by year.

Ronen's compatriot, the equally renowned Ofira Henig, tackled the Israeli-Palestinian conflict far less directly the same year: she took a literary short cut via two French texts about the Algerian War, *Le Retour au Désert*, by B.-M. Koltès,² which won her four theatre awards, and a few months later, *Les Paravents*, by J. Genet.³ For her, in all wars, from the Trojan War, "mother of all wars," to the Algerian War or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the confrontation over land is the same; similarly, the battle between two cultures and the isolation of each nation; in short, it is a question of human rights, the theme she chose for the Israel Festival of which she was artistic director. The Trojan War may no longer have provided close parallels to the present conflict here, but related it to a timeless human problem, which contributed to its geographical, historical, and philosophical relativization, thereby promoting better understanding, if not acceptance.

On the contrary, the realism of Argentinian-Spanish director Rodrigo Garcia was only equaled by his desire to provoke, as was cleverly suggested by the title of an article by Jean-Louis Perrier: "Rodrigo Garcia cooks up *Agamemnon* in anti-globalist fashion" (2003). It was pointless looking for Aeschylus in this 2003 adaptation performed at Gibellina, Sicily, during the Orestiades festival. The text was a mere pretext and invitation to touch on the idea of tragedy on a planetary scale, that of the shelf displays in a supermarket, the main battlefield of today, and their subjection to America; hence the subtitle in this version of *Agamemnon*: "I went to the supermarket and gave my son a thumping." The Twin Towers, a squadron of roast chicken, a set of cards from ruling families (Lady Di as Clytemnestra, Dodi Al-Fayed or Ben Laden as Aegisthus, Prince Charles or Berlusconi as Agamemnon, Saddam's daughter as Iphigenia etc.), Christ who self replicated like so many loaves of bread by kissing himself on the mouth: this ultra-realism can be somewhat confusing.

In general, directors seem to be asking the question: how great a distance to take from the Trojan War to bring it to life in today's theatre? The Canadian Denis Marleau struggled to convince us in his version of Seneca's *Agamemnon* in 2011 at the Comédie-Française (Darge 2011). Seneca's overlong monologues, even in Florence Dupont's fine translation, lacked Sophocles' tragic force and threatened to bore, in spite of a staging which uncovered many delightful parallels between the very modern and the very ancient: the mobile flats evoked both "the dense undergrowth of a forest of dreams and the labyrinths of the unconscious"; the video projections on the puppets and masks, in an extension of Gordon Craig's idea, played the roles of super puppets on whose masks the multiple faces of the actors performed the role of chorus and gave the effect, according to the journalist, Fabienne Darge, "of a whispered polyphony speaking intimately" (2011). But, Darge concluded,

2. Production at the Khan Theatre in Jerusalem.

3. Production at the Habima theatre in December 2002.

the beauty of the device failed to revive one's fascination for "these mythical figures that have survived unimpaired for over 2,000 years, and still get under (in)humanity's skin."

Would a text written by a contemporary author provoke a greater reaction? This is the bet taken by Christian Schiaretti, director of the TNP (Théâtre National Populaire) in Villeurbanne, who, having already twice staged Sophocles' original version of *Philoctetes*, commissioned a new one from Jean-Pierre Siméon. The latter, following in the footsteps of André Gide (*Philoctète* 1899) and Heiner Müller (1964), reworked the text with a modern variation. The performance at the Odéon theatre in 2009 could be summed up, according to Brigitte Salino, as "alone on this Earth," devoid of all tragedy (2009). The realism of the costumes (pocketed trousers and fitted T-shirts eighties style) distracted even from the notable Laurent Terzieff, who played Philoctetes.

And what of that text halfway between antiquity and today – Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*? In 2013, Jean-Yves Ruf's production at the Comédie-Française failed to impress, adhering over-meticulously to the text. This particular point of the Trojan War when Greeks and Trojans were locked in stalemate is obviously difficult to portray: Bernard Sobel and Declan Donellan both succeeded in bringing life to the many philosophical and rhetorical exchanges, wrote Fabienne Darge; but Jean-Yves Ruf, in a rather short-sighted interpretation of the text, set aside the main issues: "dehumanization, the objectification of man in war, the exploitation of relationship – including love – the ravages of time" (La Comédie Française). The production, Darge concluded, was "laborious, sluggish, heavy as a big old pudding" (La Comédie Française).

Mythological Realism, or, the Invention of the Trojan War

Fifteen years later, contrary to these realistic Trojan Wars (whether by *osmosis* in a political context, through too close adherence to the text, or because they lacked the vital force of tragedy), Klaus Grüber's production of *Iphigenia in Tauris* at the Schaubühne in Berlin (February 1998), and again at MC93 in Bobigny (September 1998), and *Les Marchands*,⁴ a play written and directed by Joël Pommerat at the Odéon in September 2013, abandoned all pretensions to naturalism. They addressed the unconscious in each of us. Grüber took the *Iphigenia in Tauris* that Goethe rewrote four times between 1779 and 1786, his "child of pain,"⁵ as he called it, transposing it from prose into verse, and reread and recreated it in all its poetry. Transforming Goethe's choice of this particular episode in the Trojan War, not one of war but of the love between Iphigenia and Orestes, the road to appeasement, to

4. One of two plays put on by the author at the Odéon: *Au monde* and *Les Marchands*.

5. Mein Schmerzenkind.

reconciliation between the world and oneself, Grüber appealed to everyone's unconscious and created a performance that, like the scenery, resembles a mother's lullaby to her child:

the lapping of the waves, the sound as they break on the shore, in the Mediterranean morning sun ... which rises above the full calm of the golden sand, a few olive trees, the entrance to a temple perched on a rock ... as beautiful as the vision of creation's first morning. It is Iphigenia's last. She will not die. She will learn what became of her family after Diana took her away on a cloud to the banks of the Tauris, so that she might escape death at the hands of her father, Agamemnon. (Salino, "Klaus Michaël Grüber Magnific")

Grüber both felt and made you feel, told you everything and revealed nothing, spoke, in his theatre as in life, in metaphors and images, "in the ancient manner of a mythical character" (Salino, "Klaus Michaël Grüber: L'Ombre du Soir"), who cannot escape the theatre. "Tears are an integral part of theatre," he says, eternally concerned with loss and renewal, fear and power. This intimate approach to the Trojan War and *Iphigenia in Tauris* doubtless resonates with his own story: belonging to that generation born under threat of bombs, who suffered from the memory of the Nazi skeletons hidden in family cupboards and who uses artifice to register his protest against the history of war and its shams; professionalism and formal theatre must be replaced by a return to emotions. "As an archaeologist breathes on the sand, Grüber breathes on Goethe's verse. Gently, in a gesture of pure beauty, he reveals the relics that have remained on the banks of the Tauris for all eternity" (Salino, "Klaus Michaël Grüber: L'Ombre du Soir"). Yet, this is no archaeological restoration of Iphigenia but a revelation of what remains of the myth in our collective memory.

In the same way, Joël Pommerat, author and director—or rather stage and screen writer, as he prefers to say, also thinks it is important to keep naturalism at a certain distance, even if he portrays, superficially, a world close to our own social and economic reality. After directing shows that were as abstract as they were fascinating and mysterious, he performed an about-face in 2000 and returned to "a more concrete reality, featuring figures and situations from contemporary life ..., to a reality loaded with symbolic import," as he explains. The performance of *Les Marchands* at the Odéon in 2013 was in this mould: the world of business, the problems of the workplace, and, equally, the lack of work (Darge, "Joël Pommerat"). In this modern tragedy, Pommerat, according to Fabienne Darge, "raises this banal subject matter to its mythological dimension." The economy played the part of Fate in Antiquity: "television holds the place of a familiar and domestic god, and the dead return amongst the living to deliver their oracles—notably, on television, a child is sacrificed to save a firm threatened with closure, like Iphigenia to victory in the Trojan War" (Darge, "Joël Pommerat").

The depiction of the realities of war and the words of the text, however

justified they seem in context, only reproduce themselves, without achieving any bearing on our modern existence, unlike a Grüber or a Pommerat who recreate a mythological reality: a reality which resonates with echoes of the Trojan War within us and inscribes itself in our imagination and in our lives today, in those figures of humanity and inhumanity. The symbolic translates reality more powerfully than reality itself.

II – The Trojan War in New Writing

Is it a distorting lens, analyzing these performances through the drama critics of *Le Monde*? The situation is not very different for new writing. We will confront, in turn, texts written by unpublished writers, stored in the Centre National du Théâtre,⁶ with literary texts by established writers of the same period. The first group, still evolving, will allow us to distinguish the specific features of the second and vice versa.

The Adaptations of Unpublished Authors: The Inversion of a Character's Destiny

From the realism of the performances previously discussed, we will see in these texts a principle of adapting a central fable—based around the Trojan War and its main characters—to contemporary taste. To talk of adaptation rather than updating would be more correct in view of the textual maneuvers carried out on the narrative content: on the dramatic focus obtaining to a single character rather than the whole group (in this instance, Iphigenia, Philoctetes, and Helen), which make the Trojan War and its main textual sources fertile ground for dramatic reworking. Written by French authors aged between 40 – 55 years old on average, these plays deal less with the Trojan War than with a situation and a climate of war evocative of modern society, its internal conflicts and its economic and social problems; an iconic character will take their revenge on fate; the play, like an exorcism, constructs a mythical anti-fate. Everything contributes to the identification of the reader or spectator with its *catharsis*.

Thus, in Jean-René Lemoine's *Iphigenia*,⁷ whose eponymous character becomes proactive in her visionary lucidity, she ends by dominating the story of which she had been the victim. The Greek fleet awaits Iphigenia's proposed wedding to the warrior Achilles, which is just a mocking prefiguring of her death. Everything happens to Iphigenia in a single night: she is woken by a premonition and realizes that this is her last night and that, like Cassandra, she will foresee the future, the implacable reality of her own death and beyond: that a war that will sweep a whole people to a terrible victory. Parallel

6. These texts are available for consultation at the CNT.

7. CNT, 2010, 30p. Received help with the staging and writing.

to this, her love for Patrochlos, faithful companion of Achilles, to whom she was promised, becomes her defense against the terrible violence that has struck this family, marked out by destiny. And, now, Iphigenia is soon overcome with pity in front of Agamemnon and this world; a world caught between treachery and cowardice which is disintegrating and falling apart.

Equally, Philoctetes⁸ departs here from Sophocles' text, thus finding his own truth: Cédric Demangeot takes this figure of failure, forced to go to the Trojan War then abandoned by Ulysses with his wounded, ulcerating, and stinking foot on the island of Lemnos, and turns him into a figure of resistance: Philoctetes not only refuses to surrender Heracles' bow to Ulysses, but also refuses to return to Troy. He chooses to remain on the island, and his seclusion finally helps him to discover "real life." To summarise, Philoctetes' gangrenous leg—abhorred by the Greeks for whom it is a desecration of the body and destiny of victors in their glory—is itself the source of self conquest, which the author explores in a long monologue.

In another instance, Helen, finds a freedom she never attains in the myth, from the pen of Jean-Loup Martin.⁹ This author transforms Fair Helen into a woman unceasingly subject to the whims of men and of destiny. He liberates her from her jail by making her a figure of flesh, freed and driven by her own desires, provoking men's desire. This is an ode addressed to her, sensitive, tender, sensual, and counter to the traditional vision of the myth:

Everyone has read Homer, Euripides and Giraudoux; everyone knows you, Helen. But you can live and relive over and again. You can still be the plaything of gods and men and yet free to act and to make decisions. You love your husband Menelaus, despite choosing to deceive him with Paris; you love your daughter Hermione, despite abandoning her. You discover pleasure, desire, the wish to live, liberty, even if you pay for it all with agonizing remorse... After your death, Helen, in the glory of the centuries, you can finally be yourself.

And the text ends with this declaration from Helen: "I'm eternally alive in the heart of every man."

Helen's freedom also features prominently in the rather grimmer setting of another play called *K.L.N., Le cas Hélène*.¹⁰ This is not about Helen of Troy, but NH, or New Helen, who is only known by her initials. In her quest for the myth of Helen, NH discovers on her way both love and sex, but above all, a devastated world which encapsulates the events, behavior, and obsessions of today's world with its many wars, both overt and covert: Twin Tow-

8. CNT, *Philoctète*, Cédric Demangeot (born in 1974). Presented at the Maison de la Poésie 7 January 2009.

9. Lyon, drama writers days, Chambéry, comp'act, 2004, 93p.

10. *K.L.N., Le cas Hélène*, Béatrice Houplain (born in 1956). Received some support from the DMDTS (State Arts body) in 2003.

ers, tattoos, orphanages, psychiatric hospitals. It is true to say that NH is unfortunate, but she is free to confront the world, whereas the myth held her locked in a passive mode.

The Adaptation by Established Writers: Changing the World?

The recent writings of more established authors are not substantially different from the former: adaptations to a contemporary realism, characters reworked in the mould of modern heroes who shake off destiny. But a vision of the world seems to outstrip the subjectivity of the characters: the world may be resisted, certainly, but how?

In *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom*,¹¹ Edward Bond transforms the Homeric subject matter: it is not Helen that the Greeks come to rescue but a statue of the goddess of Good Fortune, that is to say, an abstract and symbolic representation which keeps all tendencies to portraying the psychology of the character as well as that of the men who are courting her at bay. Hecuba, on the other hand, becomes a determinant character: arriving at Troy, the Greeks find before them the queen, Priam's widow. Having seized the city, they take her captive but get shipwrecked. She is stranded on an island. One day, a runaway, escaped from the Athenian mines, arrives. The dispossessed queen and the hunted slave unite in the struggle for freedom. The central issue of the play, which its author calls a "socialist rhapsody," is to change the world: "freedom is possible." In a poem written for the play, there is the same anguished questioning and feeling of responsibility for Astyanax and all the world's children: "What, us, can we change the world/With tenderness?" (Bond 150).

Like the Israeli plays we discussed earlier, Levin Hanokh's *The Trojan Women, after Euripides*¹² is anchored in the context of the actual Israeli-Palestinian War and includes realistic effects. This is an acerbic criticism of the political, social, and cultural reality of the Israeli State, whose policies of settlement and expansionism are undiminished since the War of 1967. This modern tragedy, written in 1984, when Israel pursued its intervention in the Lebanon, raises the question of a "just war" and the values sacred to the country: strength, heroism, and sacrifice. The author, therefore, explores less the subjectivity of such and such a character than the condition of the defeated, with whom he identifies. The constant *mises en abyme* of the myth's writings in today's writings are signs of the exorcism of destiny: how to reverse the destiny of Israel's women?

11. *The Woman*, 1979, 1980 by Edward Bond; *La Femme: Scènes de Guerre et de Liberté*, trans. Georges Bas, l'Arche, 2006. The play was staged in London 10 August 1978, at the (Olivier Theatre) National Theatre, directed by Edward Bond.

12. Lévin Hanokh (1944-1999), *Théâtre Choisi III-Pièces Politiques* (French translation), éd. théâtrales, 2004.

Lina Prosa, in her turn, centers her work on the atmosphere of war and the character of Cassandra, projected into the most recent and most desperate of contemporary events and times. She sets her play, *Cassandre on the Road*¹³ in a capitalist world:

Cassandre is Greek but has emigrated to America. She is the daughter of a general contractors' foreman. But her mythical past as a prophetess and Trojan princess lives on in her, even to the extent of reviving memories linked to the *Iliad* and the Trojan War. In the present, Cassandre has been fired by Coca-Cola because she foresaw the economic crisis. Rejected everywhere, Cassandre becomes a drifter, continuously disbelieved and trailing pieces of cans and electric wires, relics from industrial archaeology and from her mythical past.

The spectacular slippage of the play between the most concrete of modern realities and a mythical antiquity is reminiscent of that of Rodrigo Garcia, all the more so because they are both anti-capitalist pieces. However, as we will see in the conclusion, this writing is also an aesthetic reflection about tragedy and the conditions around its depiction; it goes far beyond a merely provocative realism.

Let us complete this series of examples with the writing of Simon Abkarian, at the juncture between realism and mythology. A former member of the Theatre du Soleil, the choices Simon Abkarian makes are those of his generation: he brings the Trojan War up to date and centers the action on Menelaus and Penelope.¹⁴ Menelaus is a deserted husband; he suffers, torn between the pride of a man whose virility is impugned and his conscience as a king which makes it his duty to wage war. It is, however, not so much the psychology but the personal tragedy and how he overcomes it that interest the author, conscious as the latter is of the words of the chorus in *Agamemnon*: "it's through suffering that we achieve understanding." His writing and his directing give prominence to the endurance of hardship, which, beyond individual stories, is also the endurance of history and memory. A rhapsody sings a succession of epic poems with the audience; epic poems referring to invented episodes or scenes (proposal, coupling). With a psychological element, or, even, a vaudevillian moment as his starting point, Abkarian makes "a Greek chamber tragedy," which illustrates his empathy "with the world's tumult," as Frédérique Roussel describes it in *Libération* (2013). The cry of the world is that of a torn conscience, emotionally compounded by the music Abkarian uses: traditional Greek music—rebetika from Smyrna arranged for

13. *Cassandre on the Road*, 2003, (French translation), Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2012, Jean-Paul Manganaro.

14. *Pénélope, Ô Pénélope*, Actes sud-papiers, 2008; *Ménélas Amoureux*, Actes Sud, 2012, staged at the Grand Parquet (Jardins d'Eole, Paris, Janvier 2013). Interview on his work on France Culture 11 January 2013. See also *Libération* 31 March 2013.

guitars and bouzouki, still played today in Greece. Songs that hurt, says the author; songs that speak of crimes of passion, drugs, politics, and musicians who play for hours without a break. So, perhaps, the realism of this version is not an end in itself but a starting point for opening things up on a double horizon of both the collective memory and the actual individual unconscious; aspects that, we may recall, *Le Monde* praised in the Trojan Wars of Grüber and Pommerat.

III – The Narrative and Beyond

Taking contemporary thinking on how antiquity is transmitted into account will allow us to build a theoretical framework of the different approaches we have evoked, differentiated among themselves by their realism.

Where does the realism come from? Actually, from the narrative. We have seen that poetic or oneiric prose can bring the Trojan War more to life. The example of Alessandro Baricco,¹⁵ who has established himself as one of the greatest Italian writers of his generation, is instructive: for his modern version of the *Iliad*, which has been very well received in Europe, he makes similar choices to those analyzed above. Firstly, in the importance accorded to the narrative, in order to make the story more readable: according to him, the repeated apparitions of the gods, intervening to direct events or confirm the war's outcome, break up the narrative even when they are dispensable from a narrative point of view. Secondly, in the importance accorded to the subjectivation of the tale: he selects a series of characters from the *Iliad* and has them recount their stories by substituting for the external Homeric narrator, to encourage the reader "not to wilt away in the boredom of the impersonal" and to allow them to identify more closely with the story. (Comparable choices may be discerned in other contemporary retellings of the *Iliad*, such as study versions or more ambitious approaches, like Jean-Pierre Vernant's 1999 essay "L'Univers, les Dieux et les Hommes: Récits Grecs des Origines"). Finally, in the importance accorded to the overall coherence of the tale, Baricco proceeds with some additions to the initial text, which allow him to modulate it to suit modern tastes and give it an overall unity. The Australian David Malouf proceeds similarly in *Ransom*,¹⁶ inventing small episodes and inserting them into the traditional stories, which serve to humanize the characters: thus Priam, on his way to the Greek camp, chats to a carter before once more following his destiny. "The bricks are Homer's, but the wall is reduced to the

15. Alessandro Baricco, Homère, *Iliade*, 2004; (French translation), Albin Michel, 2006. Text read in public in Rome and Turin, Autumn 2004. More than 10,000 spectators. Readings broadcast by Italian radio. *An Iliad*. Publ Canongate. (English translation).

16. *Ransom*, by David Malouf. Australian writer born in 1934, achieved worldwide recognition with *The Great World* (1990) (Commonwealth Writers' Prize and the French Prix Femina Étranger). See Ahl's "Une Soirée Avec le Roi Priam," *Le Monde*, 23 August 2013.

essentials,” resumes Baricco, who wants to ensure that his text is accessible for public readings. The latter is, however, puzzled: “To remove the gods from the *Iliad* is doubtless not a good idea if you want to understand Homeric civilisation, but it is an excellent idea ... for salvaging the story and bringing it back within the realm of contemporary tales” (11). This dialectic would seem to sum up the questions raised by the texts and performances already mentioned. Is archaeological reconstitution, even incorporating variations, a necessary requirement sufficing for the passing down of these tales?

When Jean-Pierre Vernant, in the essay “L’Univers, les Dieux et les Hommes: Récits Grecs des Origines” brings us his *Original Greek Tales* (the book’s subtitle), it is more to recreate for us a whole “universe” than reproduce a memorable episode; a universe where the tale’s drama itself resonates, within the listener too, outside any pedagogical purpose, through the medium of a embodied voice: “like a fairy tale, whose prime purpose is to pursue throughout the narrative, from start to finish, the thread of the tale in its dramatic tension” (10, 14). Like an ancient story teller, or grandparent, he describes the world of the ancient Greeks “whose survival in each of us, seems (to him) more important than ever in the modern world.” He rejoices in a heritage that is delivered

orally, through what Plato calls nurses tales, in the way that things are handed down through the generations outside any official teachings, without books, to comprise an ‘unwritten’ heritage: from the rules for good conduct in speech and action, to good habits and good methodology technically speaking for walking, running, swimming, cycling and climbing... (10-14)

After reading Vernant, and in the aftermath of these quotations, a question is raised: What more should be retained from these Trojan Wars other than their text, precisely, or rather, their “messaging around” textually and scenically? What “unwritten luggage”?

Furthermore, is transmitting the recollected experience of the Trojan War to the letter, even brought up to date, to transmit a collective memory, that is to say, the spirit and the vision of the world? As Jacques Roubaud, from whom Vernant borrowed the idea, says, the Homeric poems, with their elements of legend, “are not just tales”: rather they contain a treasury of ideas, linguistic forms, cosmological imagination, moral precepts, etc., which constitute a common heritage from the Greeks of the pre-classical era (qtd. in Vernant, “Poésie, Mémoire, Lecture” 10, 12-13). Moreover, when Jean-Pierre Vernant writes about the Trojan War, does he suggest that it is useless to retell it according to Homer, but that “on the other hand, one can try to recount the reasons for and the meaning of the conflict,” which requires one to “transport oneself” to certain mountains “which figure at the origins of this drama lived out by mortals: Mount Pelion in Greece, Mount Ida in the Troad region, Mount Taygetus in Sparta” (91)? What vision of the world does the modern imaginary world of the Trojan War transmit to us?

Baricco himself, the narrative's defender, pleads at the end of his work, in an "annotation on the war," for another beauty in the *Iliad*: not that of the Homeric poem taught in school, but that of the "monument to war" and "between the lines, to the memory of an intransigent love of peace" (233-44), often expressed by the women. According to Baricco, it is even the *Iliad*'s strongpoint that it passes on this duty for us to accomplish. He adds that this duty also encompasses, paradoxically, the beauty of war, the burning heart of man's experience, perpetually fascinated by arms and heroes, and that no pacifism should dilute this paradoxical lesson.

Gracq expresses similar views on the beauty of war in his preface to Kleist's *Penthesilée*, written in defense of the cosmic beauty of war. Although this work may have lacked all poetry for Kleist's contemporaries, Gracq says, this romantic author knew equally well how to lend color and shape to our darkest fears by giving central importance to the image: "the slightly shrunken historicism of the uniforms and liveries suddenly gives way to fabulous images, whose outlines are already blurred by the mists of the myth. As for all works that have been forged at high temperature, you might say that a sort of vitrification has taken place" (13). The work, thus, becomes "swollen with remembrances, presentments, and analogies"; out of a fleeting perspective, is born "a crowd of mythical, dreamlike figures" who speak to "our historical memory which goes beyond the curtain just raised" (13). "Like all truly symbolic works, *Penthesilée* conveys nothing very precisely: it would be a waste of time to try and summarize its 'message'; rather it heightens to the point of meaning" (13). Gracq's preface dates back to 1954; *Le Monde* from the last twenty years seems to have drunk from the same well; antiquity reaches us less through a restitution of its reality or even its eventual "message" than through its symbolization, its transfiguration, its "vitrification" of mythical or dream figures who speak to our historical memory—which is also what Grüber, Pommerat, and Abkarian seem to have achieved in going beyond the narrative. This is doubtless where Vernant's "unwritten luggage" resides.

Barbara Cassin, takes the symbolization of the Trojan War a step further. This specialist in ancient Greek texts and sophists sees in Fair Helen a figure that is emblematic of well known pronouncements on women. Her actual historic existence is unimportant; Helen only exists in, through, or for words. Her name, which echoes that of the Greeks themselves (Helen/Hellenic) seems to be a play on words: kidnapped or captivating? Real, spectral, oriental, "bitch," Helen is superhuman and funny, "divine and *offenbachisable*." Henceforth, we will not be surprised by Mephistopheles' proposition, in Goethe's *Faust*, that he should drink a potion that will allow him to see Helen in all women. Through this rereading of the characters in the Trojan War, Barbara Cassin puts together an important "helenography," from Homer to Queneau, via Gorgias, Isocrates, Marlowe, Ezra Pound, and many others, offset with paintings: a transhistoric, transtextual, transnarrative imaginary

world, a sort of “curio of resounding inanity...”¹⁷ Might not this immanent reading of the myth inspire a new production in the future, just the opposite of all narrative of archaeological intention, whether it follows the logic of the myth or its metamorphoses?

In conclusion, the imaginary world of the Trojan War on the western stage today is all of these things: war, great characters, collective destinies, a singular destiny, threatened liberty, recovered freedom, but, even more, the questioning of how to communicate this heritage, to pass it on, to understand its very paradoxes. As we have seen, realism continually makes alterations to the myth and exhausts itself trying to give it meaning: is the Trojan War simply an abandoned issue, purely poetic and theatrical? Lina Prosa’s writing allows us, perhaps, to approach this imaginary world within the limits of what can be represented, just as our transversal readings lead us to glimpse it. In *Cassandre on the Road*, a verse tragedy for one character and a chorus, Cassandre recalls the *Iliad* and the Trojan War, but does not know what to do with it. As in *Programme Penthésilée: Entraînement pour la Bataille Finale* or in *Lampedusa Beach*,¹⁸ a modern odyssey of candidates for shipwrecking, of unknown soldiers in unacknowledged wars, the characters replay the myth’s story, without understanding it: “nearly identical” are the opening and closing words of the play; “we have copied it without answering it.” Cassandre’s only certainty is that “Troy is a credit to any story which ends badly.” But how do we make sure that this memory helps to prevent future conflicts? So the Trojan War remains on stage, in writing as in thinking, a question without an answer, but isn’t that its vocation? To represent, that is to say, to render both actual and meaningful, on stage as on the page, this hope: to remember, so that war is “no more.” This same hope texorcizes its desperation when times are bad; on the Maodan, in February 2014, when, yes, the memories of Budapest, Prague, Grozny, and Troy, are on all our lips. Yes, something whispers in us, out of our historical memory: “no pasarón” (they shall not pass); but we must believe, must we not, that the Trojan War is still taking place? For, the Trojan War of today teaches us that remembrance is not enough to put an end to it.

Professor
University of Paris-Est-Créteil
France

17. For the development of this see the article by Roger-Pol Droit “Les Femmes: Avantages et Inconvénients.” *Le Monde* 05 May 2000, which we have broadly outlined.

18. *Programme-Penthésilée: Entraînement pour la Bataille Finale*, 2008 et *Lampedusa Beach*, 2003; (trad. frçse Jean-Paul Manganaro), éd. Les Solitaires intempestifs, 2012.

Works Cited

- Abkarian, Simon. Interview. *France Culture* 11 Jan. 2013. Print.
- Ahl, Nils C. "Une Soirée avec le Roi Priam." *Le Monde* 23 Aug. 2013. Print.
- Bond, Edward. *La Femme: Scènes de Guerre et de Liberté*. Trans. Georges Bas. Paris: L'Arche, 2006. Print.
- Cassin, Barbara. *Voir Hélène en Toute Femme: D'Homère à Lacan*. Paris: Les Empêcheurs de Tourner en Rond, 2000. Print.
- Darge, Fabienne. "A la Comédie-Française: Un Doux Ennui devant les Voix Endeuillées d'*Agamemnon* de Sénèque." *Le Monde* 29 May 2011. Print.
- . "Joël Pommerat Cherche le Mythe sous la Banalité." *Le Monde* 13 Sept. 2013. Print.
- . "La Comédie-Française Retrouve Ses Ors et Ses Pompes." *Le Monde* 31 Jan. 2013. Print.
- Droit, Roger-Pol. "Les Femmes: Avantages et Inconvénients." *Le Monde* 05 May 2000. Print.
- Dupeyron, Catherine. "A la Guerre Comme à la Guerre." *Le Monde* 10 Feb. 2002. Print.
- Marchay-Cheinet, Séverine. *D'Hélène à Ulysse, L'Odyssée de la Guerre de Troie*. Paris: Ellipses, 2009. Print.
- Perrier, Jean-Louis. "Rodrigo Garcia Cuisine Agamemnon à la Mode Altermondialist." *Le Monde* 10 Oct. 2003. Print.
- Salino, Brigitte. "Laurent Terzieff Est Bien Seul dans Philoctète." *Le Monde* 2 Oct. 2009. Print.
- . "Klaus Michaël Grüber Magnifie *Iphigénie en Tauride* à Berlin." *Le Monde* 25 Feb. 1998. Print.
- . "Klaus Michael Grüber: L'ombre du soir." *Le Monde*, 19 Sept. 1998. Print.
- Roussel, Frederique. *Libération* 31 Mar. 2013. Print.
- Vernant, Jean-Pierre. "L'Univers, les Dieux et les Hommes: Récits Grecs des Origines." *La Librairie du XXI^e Siècle*. Paris: Le Seuil, 1999. Print.
- . "Poésie, Mémoire, Lecture." *Les Conférences du Divan*. Paris-Tübingen, Eggingen: Editions Isele, 1998. Print.

* This research has been co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund – ESF) and Greek national funds through the Operational Program "Education and Lifelong Learning" of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) – Research Funding Program: THALIS -UOA- «The Theatre as educational good and artistic expression in education and society»